

Lifestyle



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REVIEW

'Richard' powerful, refreshing

By Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

With a massive cast powerfully directed by Kent Thompson, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival has unveiled a refreshing reading of "Richard III" in which the most surprising facet is the number of laughs that rocked the audience.

From Richard's, and the play's, opening line — "Now is the winter of our discontent ..." — we detect in Ray Chambers' interpretation a sardonic humor which informs the entire concept of the play.

"Richard III" purports to present the reign of the last Yorkist king in the Wars of the Roses, a series of civil wars that for 30 years pitted the Yorkists and Lancastrians against each other for control of the throne. When Henry Tudor's forces defeated Richard on Bosworth Field, the wars ended and the Tudor dynasty began with the victor, who had no legitimate claim to the throne, taking the name Henry VII.

The play paints Richard as almost the ultimate villain, with only Iago among Shakespeare's characters acting the villain more gratuitously. And Iago shed considerably less blood.

Ray Chambers plays a Richard with an almost comic awareness of his own villainy and with a grotesque deformity, inside and out. After ordering a lord to spread a rumor to the multitude that his mother was unfaithful to his father, he suggests that the lord not be too insistent on the matter because — and he delivers this offhandedly — "You know, my lord, my mother lives." Chambers makes this tone the keynote of his splendid characterization.

Sonja Lanzener turns in a chilling performance as the enigmatic Queen Margaret. Jill Tanner is both regal and heartbreaking as Queen Elizabeth, the widow of Edward IV. Kathleen McCall, as Lady Anne opposite Chambers, makes an absolutely unbelievable scene work, the scene in which Richard, who has killed both her husband and his father, woos her over the bleeding body of her dead father-in-law. Greta Lambert is astonishing in an aged character role as the Duchess of York, Richard's mother who detests him.

Among the men, Sam Gregory's Buckingham, an almost effete character who nearly equals Richard in evil, is striking. Barry Boys is a strong, compelling Stanley.

Paul Hebron as Clarence has a moving moment in his death scene in the Tower of London. John Woodson's Hastings has an appealing innocence that makes his sudden murder more rending.

Allan Swafford has taught and reviewed theater, as well